

Normally, I am a proud man, too proud to wear a girl's strawberry lip gloss. But a man with seriously chapped lips can't afford to be proud. Chapped lips are very humbling. I put the lip gloss on. It was the most cloying odoriferous strawberry scented shit I ever hope to smell. It undermined my masculinity. You could smell it a mile away. But it really did help my lips. Forgot all about them, in fact. So time comes, as I knew it would, when I had to kick some guy out. As luck would have it, he was a pretty big guy, too. Furthermore, he was with a friend of similar stature who was equally adverse to his leaving. And I smelled like a pie. "Gotta go," I said, smelling like jam. The redolence of strawberries wafted through the air. "What?" asked his big hard-of-hearing friend. "HE'S GOT TO LEAVE. HE CAN'T GRAB THE WAITRESSES' TITS!" I said, trying to look big and slightly deranged, while smelling like a preserve. "Oh," he said. "Oh," said his hard-of-hearing friend. They did leave, too, but not with the degree of urgency that I was used to. They didn't exactly run out the door, screaming and begging for their lives. They probably realized what most people have known for some time now. A guy wearing strawberry lip gloss can only be so tough.

#### I WAS NOT A BUNNY

"I was not a bunny," she said. "I was a centerfold." I had made the mistake of addressing her as a former bunny, which she was not, rather than as a former centerfold, which she was. "Bunnies," she said, "are the girls with the ears and the tails. They work at the clubs and the resorts. They're like waitresses, sort of. The centerfold is the model at the center of the magazine with the staples in her navel. The fold out. I was a centerfold." I nodded my head. "I see," I said. "Sorry." "Don't be," she said, "everybody makes that mistake, confusing the bunnies with the centerfolds."

We were sitting in the physical therapy section of a Pasadena chiropractor's office. The ice pack strapped to her knee and the hot towels draped over my shoulder were



supposed, if administered daily, to make our injuries go away.

"Of course, it was much classier then," she said, "being a fold out was. I mean, we didn't show every single thing like they do now. I was pre-pubic."

She smiled. She seemed pleased that she had remained virtuous, glad that she had posed before the moral decadence that demanded a centerfold drop her pants.

"You know what?" she said, scratching her ear, "I used to practically live at the mansion, not that long ago, either."

She went on to tell me all about her life as a fold out: parties at Hef's, backgammon, all the movie stars she'd met, etc., etc., as girls in pastels carrying clipboards walked in and out of the physical therapy room.

We sat silently for a bit.

I thought about how strongly her hair resembled white nylon. I don't know what she thought about.

Maybe about those parties at the mansion.

Maybe about the general public's obsession with pubic hair.

Maybe she didn't think at all.

Who knows?

Then, out of a clear blue sky, she asked me,

"how old do you think I am?"

She looked forty. She was probably thirty-five, but she looked forty. I scratched my head and tightened my lip trying to look as though I were giving the question very careful consideration.

"I'd say thirty," a safe underestimate, I thought.

She bounced up and down on her chair, tossing her hair from side to side, and clapping her hands.

"That's what everyone thinks," she said, smiling. "Really, that's what absolutely, positively everybody thinks."

"She leaned towards me shielding her mouth with her hand and whispered, "I'm thirty-four."

I hung my head, shaking it slowly. "Sure fooled me," I said. "I figured you for thirty maximum."

"Thirty-four, huh?" I said, slightly wide-eyed, apparently skeptical.

She nodded, smiling even more.

"Wow," I said.

-- Eric Grow

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